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U. S. Department of Agriculture

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Wednesday, December 16, 1936.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "CHRISTMAS CAKES AND COOKIES." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture. Bulletin available, Leaflet 113-L, "Honey and Some of Its Uses."

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Did you ever hear of the old tradition about Christmas fruit cakes and good luck? Whoever is in the house when the cake is being made, they say, must give it a stir for luck. I've seen my mother hand the big wooden stirring spoon to the neighbor who happened in at the back door, or to the iceman, or even the postman. I never found out whether the luck was supposed to be visited on the house generally or on the cake, but it seemed a simple and harmless precaution to take, if one were superstitious!

I wouldn't limit the stirring just to fruit cakes, though. Why not extend it to the pound cake, the angel food, or the ice-box cookies -- all the good things that will be on hand for the holidays? Of course, when I think about holiday cakes, I include those that will be eaten at home as well as those given as gifts.

Probably most of my listeners have finished their fruit cakes several weeks ago, and set them away to grow mellow. There is still time enough before Christmas to make a fruit cake if you have none, but it will not be quite as well-blended as if made earlier. You may like to have a few tips on mixing and baking, from the Bureau of Home Economics.

Get everything ready before you begin mixing. Prepare all the fruit and nuts first. Pick them over very carefully, wash and dry the fruit, cut up citron or candied pineapple, and make sure there are no bits of shell among the nuts, and that they are sweet and fresh. Let all the ingredients stand in the kitchen until they are of room temperature. Line a well-greased tube pan with greased paper, in readiness. If you cook the cake very slowly in a very moderate oven (about 300 degrees F.) you need not steam it first. When the cake is done, cool it on a rack before wrapping it in waxed or parchment paper. Store in a tight tin.

Perhaps you have a high-school age group of young people at home between Christmas and New Year's and want some good, but less expensive holiday cakes. There are several plainer fruit and nut cakes you can make which will be very satisfactory. For instance, have you tried old-fashioned apple-sauce cake? You use a cupful of unsweetened, thick, smooth applesauce instead of milk in a simple eggless spice cake recipe, adding a teaspoon of soda for leavening. Put a cupful of chopped raisins in, and a few nuts, too if you like.

And don't forget plain and fancy gingerbreads, both hot and cold. They're among the best "filler-uppers" in the whole cake family. You can add dates or raisins or prunes, and also nuts, to ordinary gingerbread, or use a fluffier, lighter basic recipe. You can modify the flavor with candied ginger, or



grated orange or lemon peel. Some like gingerbread frosted with chocolate. A plain gingerbread goes particularly well when served piping hot as a dessert, with whipped cream or ice cream.

Some entertaining goes on in the holidays in most families, and for those occasions a few small cakes and attractive cookies are in order. Any of the ice-box cookies are fine for these purposes, and easy to make. There's no single recipe for ice-box cookies. Any rich cookie dough that is stiff enough to form into a roll so it can be chilled in the refrigerator for several hours will make them. Crisp nut cookies, gingersnaps, and sand tarts, can all be made as ice-box cookies. Wrap the dough in heavy waxed paper, keep it on hand and slice off enough for a panful from time to time. Or make up cookies enough for all your holiday needs at once and store them in tin boxes with tight lids so they will stay crisp. In baking them, slip them out of the pan as soon as they are done, on to a board or enameled table, because the rich cookie dough becomes crisp so quickly they are likely to break when cool.

If you lived in the Scandinavian countries, or in Germany or Italy, you would use honey in making many of your Christmas cakes and cookies. This is not only because of the flavor. The honey helps the cakes to stay moist longer than those made with sugar or other sirups. German "lebkuchen," a favorite Christmas specialty, owes its unusual flavor to honey, spices, and aniseed or cardamom seeds.

I have already called attention to the honey leaflet, issued by the Bureau of Home Economics. In it there are recipes for honey-ice-box cookies and also for honey drop cookies, and a very convenient table showing how to change a recipe for white cake or chocolate cake if you want to use honey instead of sugar.

"If using honey instead of sugar," the leaflet says, "in recipes calling for sugar, reduce the liquid according to the consistency of the honey and also according to the proportion of honey used. For example, if medium thick honey is substituted for one-half of the sugar in cake or quick-bread recipes, reduce the liquid one-fourth. If honey is substituted for all the sugar, reduce the liquid one-half. If the honey is very thick or very thin, this proportion may have to be altered."

The authors of the leaflet add that in making honey cakes and quick breads, mix the honey with the liquid called for in the recipe, and bake at the lowest temperature possible for the given product. This prevents loss or change of flavor of the honey, and also avoids too rapid browning.

Even if time's too short to send for a copy of the honey leaflet, with these pointers you can surely adapt some of your regular recipes to make some honey specialties for the last-minute gift boxes or the holiday teas. And should you want to send for the leaflet, the number is 113-L, "Honey and Some of Its Uses."

